

*A Student's
Companion To*

The Gospel Of Mark

by

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Preface

While I am solely responsible for the written form of these comments and any exegetical errors contained in them, much of the credit for the best insights in this document should go to my fellow students. I have availed myself of a wide array of written sources for perspective on the book of Mark, but much of the illumination of the text which I have enjoyed has come through the comments and questions of those dear friends who studied Mark with me.

Design Of The Commentary

I have designed this commentary on the book of Mark as a quick reference to passages that may puzzle or intrigue the student. It does not address every verse nor provide a complete exposition of the passages dealt with. It does endeavor to provide insights that will make the book of Mark more meaningful to the Christian reader. I have written for the layperson who has some acquaintance with biblical Greek, but hope that the reader unfamiliar with the original language will nevertheless be able to benefit from most of the insights I've shared.

The notes that follow use the dot rather than the colon in Scripture references and three-letter abbreviations for Bible book names. Consequently, the passage traditionally designated Mark 13:1 will appear as Mar 13.1. The three-letter abbreviations for books of the Bible follow the convention of the *BibleWorks* software program (see these listed under **Abbreviations** below). Commentary sections use Mark verse references as their headings, and so introductory sections providing information not connected to a specific verse of Mark use the zero designation: 0.1, etc. Multiple sections connected to the same passage in Mark will use the section (§) designation. Therefore, the first commentary section on Mark 13.1-4 will appear as Mar 13.1-4 §1, the second as Mar 13.1-4 §2, etc. References that do not designate a three-letter book abbreviation refer to verses in the book of Mark. I have taken the liberty of converting biblical references embedded in quotations to this system so that all passages in this work can be indexed.

A Student's Companion To The Book Of Mark

At the beginning of each section, I have included my own idiosyncratic translation, made directly from the Greek text. I have not endeavored to make an elegant translation, nor a consistently literal one (with regard to Greek word order, idiomatic expressions, etc.), but have taken the liberty to sometimes translate in an over-literal fashion where I have deemed it helpful for deriving meaning from the text.

Another idiosyncrasy of this work is that the pronunciation of Greek words is given according the rules of Modern Greek, rather than according to the conventions of the Erasmian-Academic Greek most seminarians have learned. For anyone interested in the debate over which pronunciation scheme biblical scholars *should* use, I refer you to the helpful introduction to the matter at: <http://biblicalgreek.org/links/pronunciation.php>. My personal conviction is that we should stay abreast of a living language as it evolves and not invent a synthetic pronunciation scheme for academic convenience. We would not appreciate someone imposing a synthetic pronunciation scheme upon the ancient works in our language, any more than today's Greeks appreciate us doing that with theirs. Nevertheless, where I have quoted others who use transliterated words, I have not tampered with their spelling or pronunciation schemes within the quoted material.

Regarding the pronunciation of Greek terms, please note that as there is no *ch* sound as in *cheese* in Greek; any *ch* in the transliterations should be pronounced as the guttural *ch* in *Bach*. Here's a summary of the key diacritical marks employed in the phonetically spelled words:

ˈ marks the emphasized syllable.

ä = *a* as in *paw* or *father*.

ə = *a* as in *affront*.

ě = *e* as in *effort* or *air*.

ē = *i* as in *machine*, *e* as in *sheen*, *y* as in *ruby*.

ō = *o* as in *ore*.

ü = *oo* as in *loot*.

Abbreviations Used In This Work

Bible Versions

BYZ	Byzantine Text Form of the Greek New Testament.
CSB	<i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i> , © 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers.
ESV	<i>The Holy Bible: English Standard Version</i> , © 2016 by Standard Bible Society.
GNT	<i>The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition</i> , © 2011-2013 by Society Of Biblical Literature.
KJV	<i>King James Version of the English Bible</i> , © 1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada.
LXX	The Septuagint (ancient Greek version of the OT).
MT	Masoretic Text of the Hebrew OT.
NAS	<i>The New American Standard Bible</i> , © 1977 by The Lockman Foundation.
NAU	<i>The New American Standard Bible</i> , © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.
NIV	<i>The Holy Bible: New International Version</i> , © 1984 by International Bible Society.
NKJV	<i>The New King James Version</i> , © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
NLT	<i>Holy Bible, New Living Translation</i> , Second Edition, © 2004 by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
TNK	JPS Tanakh, 1985.
VUL	The Vulgate (Latin version of the Bible).

Biblical & Apocryphal Book

1Ch	1 Chronicles	Hos	Hosea
1Co	1 Corinthians	Isa	Isaiah
1Jo	1 John	Jam	James
1Ki	1 Kings	Jdg	Judges
1Ma	1 Maccabees	Jdt	Judith
1Pe	1 Peter	Jer	Jeremiah
1Sa	1 Samuel	Job	Job
1Th	1 Thessalonians	Joe	Joel
1Ti	1 Timothy	Joh	John
2Ch	2 Chronicles	Jon	Jonah
2Co	2 Corinthians	Jos	Joshua
2Jo	2 John	Jude	Jude
2Ki	2 Kings	Lam	Lamentations
2Ma	2 Maccabees	Lev	Leviticus
2Pe	2 Peter	Luk	Luke
2Sa	2 Samuel	Mal	Malachi
2Th	2 Thessalonians	Mar	Mark
2Ti	2 Timothy	Mat	Matthew
3Jo	3 John	Mic	Micah
3Ma	3 Maccabees	Nah	Nahum
4Ma	4 Maccabees	Neh	Nehemiah
Act	Acts	Num	Numbers
Amos	Amos	Oba	Obadiah
Col	Colossians	Phil	Philippians
Dan	Daniel	Phm	Philemon
Deut	Deuteronomy	Pro	Proverbs
Ecc	Ecclesiastes	Psa	Psalms
Eph	Ephesians	Rev	Revelation
Est	Esther	Rom	Romans
Ex	Exodus	Rut	Ruth
Eze	Ezekiel	Sir	Sirach or Wisdom of Ben Sira
Ezr	Ezra	Song	The Song of Solomon
Gal	Galatians	Tit	Titus
Gen	Genesis	Tob	Tobit
Hab	Habakkuk	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Hag	Haggai	Zec	Zechariah
Heb	Hebrews	Zep	Zephaniah

Bibliographic Abbreviations

ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
Acc	<i>Accordance Bible Software by OakTree Software, Inc.</i>
ACCOS	<i>Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture</i>
AAp	<i>Josephus Against Apion</i>
AEHL	<i>The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land</i>
AHGT	<i>Acts: A Handbook On The Greek Text</i>
<i>Ant</i>	<i>Josephus Antiquities of the Jews</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBCNT	<i>The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament</i>
BBCOT	<i>The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament</i>
BEB	<i>Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>
BTC	<i>Brazos Theological Commentary On The Bible: Acts</i>
CNTUOT	<i>Commentary On The New Testament Use Of The Old Testament</i>
DBPET	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times</i>
<i>Did</i>	<i>The Didache (Teaching Of The Twelve Apostles)</i>
DPHL	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i>
DSS	<i>Dead Sea Scrolls</i>
EBC	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
HBH	<i>Holman Bible Handbook</i>
HE	<i>Eusebius Ekklesiastices Historias (Church History)</i>
JFB	<i>Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible</i>
JOE	<i>Josephus</i>
Jub	<i>Jubilees</i>
NICNT	<i>The New International Commentary On The New Testament</i>
NIDB	<i>New International Dictionary Of The Bible</i>
NIDCC	<i>New International Dictionary Of The Christian Church</i>
NIGTC	<i>The New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
NNIBC	<i>Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary</i>
NT	<i>New Testament</i>
NTUOT	<i>Commentary On The New Testament Use Of The Old Testament</i>
KD	<i>Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on The Old Testament</i>
Ods	<i>Odes Of Solomon</i>
OT	<i>Old Testament</i>
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
PHI	<i>Philo</i>
Sir	<i>Ecclesiasticus, aka The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira</i>
War	<i>Josephus Jewish Wars</i>
WBC	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
WPNT	<i>Robertson, Word Pictures In The New Testament</i>
ZPEB	<i>The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia Of The Bible</i>

Miscellaneous Abbreviations

Aka	also known as
Akk	Akkadian
Ara	Aramaic
Ch., chs.	Chapter(s)
Eng	English
Grk	Greek
Heb	Hebrew
Lat	Latin
Ms, Mss	Manuscript, Manuscripts
<i>op cit</i>	In the work previously cited
V., vv.	Verse, verses

Mark 13

* Mar 13.0 §1: "The Little Apocalypse."

Mar 13, sometimes together with the parallel passages of Mat 24 and Luk 21, has been called the "Little Apocalypse."¹ This is a contrasting allusion to the "Great Apocalypse," the book of Revelation. To link Mar 13 with the Revelation in this way is fitting, since the two "apocalypses" are intimately related. The apocalyptic unveiling of Jesus is the subject of both (cf. Mat 24.3; Rev 1.1), with the former teaching foreshadowing the fuller account of the latter. Christ's teaching on the Mount of Olives provides a four-part outline within which the upheavals described in the Revelation can be organized:

1. Witness And Persecution, Luk 21.12-18,
2. Beginnings of Travail (Birth Pangs), Mar 13.5-8, Mat 24.5-8,
3. Daniel's Final Week, Mar 13.15-23, Mat 24.15-25,
4. Christ's Parousia, Mar 13.24-27, Mat 24.27-31.

However, the application of the title "Little Apocalypse" to Mar 13 by some, conveys their belief that the material of this chapter did not originate with Jesus. They suggest that this material pre-existed as an apocalyptic Jewish work of unknown authorship, which Mark took over and framed as a teaching of Jesus for his own purposes.² This theory has been acknowledged as "impossible to prove," and need not distract us. Though it attempts to address valid questions regarding the context, content, style and arrangement of the material in Mar 13, it expresses a general unbelief in predictive prophecy, as well as of a lack of understanding of Christ's person and agenda.

* Mar 13.0 §2: The Olivet Discourse.

A more biblical title for the oration of Jesus, recorded in Mar 13, Mat 24 and Luk 21, is "the Olivet Discourse," referring to the location at which the teaching was given (Mar 13.1-4). The title, "Olivet Discourse," conveys

¹ Isa 24-27 is also referred to as a Little Apocalypse.

² See Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentary, (London: Continuum, 1991), pp. 298-299.

nothing of the discourse's content, as does "Little Apocalypse," but it does not lack significance. As Jesus and his disciples sat on the Mount of Olives, they looked across the Kidron Valley at Jerusalem's temple mount — and this is a detail that Mark did not want us to miss (Mar 13.3). If Jesus and the disciples were sitting sufficiently high on the ridge they could see the entirety of the temple complex, and even some of the activity within the temple courts. They gazed, therefore, upon the very temple "fortress" where the apocalyptic events of the discourse would come to their climax, and sat on the very spot — or near it — where Jesus would return in glory (Zec 14.3-5).

*** Mar 13.1-4 §1: Grammatical Note On Genitive Absolutes.**

And *at* His proceeding out of the temple, one of his disciples says to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings. And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? In no way will a stone be left upon a stone here which will not be cast down." And *at* His sitting upon the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were asking Him privately, "Tell us when these things will be, and what *will be* the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"

A genitive absolute is a clause (normally containing both a genitive participle and a genitive subject) that conveys background information. It generally describes the setting for the action of the main verb. Linguists call it an "absolute" because it is grammatically disconnected from its sentence.³ English-speaking students who are new to Greek quickly learn the possessive use of the genitive, and so translate all genitives with the preposition *of*. Mar 13.1, however, begins with a genitive absolute, which if translated woodenly with *of*, would come out, "And **of His exiting out of the temple**, one of the disciples says to him, etc." This does not make sense. However, recognizing the genitive absolute allows us to render the problem clause as circumstantial information: "And **as He was exiting the temple**, etc." Likewise in Mar 13.3, instead of translating, "And **of His sitting on the**

³ *Absolute* is from the Lat *absolutus*, the past participle of *absolvere* (Eng *absolve*), meaning *loosed from*.

Mount of Olives opposite of the temple,” we recognize the genitive absolute and translate, “And as He was sitting, etc.”

*** Mar 13.1-4 §2: One Of His Disciples.**

Matthew wrote that Jesus’ “disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him,” and then “the disciples came to Him privately” and questioned Him (Mat 24.1-3). Mark recorded that “**one** of His disciples” exclaimed about the awesome stones and buildings, and then Peter, James, John and Andrew privately questioned Jesus. Luke wrote that “some were talking about the temple” and its beautiful stones, and that then “they questioned Him” (Luk 21.5-7). Apparently, Matthew’s general designation of “His disciples” was really a subset of the twelve, i.e., those named by Mark, and among those four one was particularly vocal about the glories of the temple complex. If we judge by his effusiveness on other occasions, the vocal disciple was probably Peter.

It seems odd that Jesus would deliver a major teaching in a private conversation with four disciples; clearly, the teaching was important for all the followers of Jesus. It’s possible that Matthew and Mark meant that the four disciples questioned Jesus away from a larger crowd of casual followers, while the four disciples questioned Jesus and the other eight listened in. Whatever the case, Jesus entrusted the Olivet Discourse to an inner circle, confident that they would take it to heart and convey it to the believing community. In Mark’s version of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus closes with, “What I say to **you** I say to **all**, ‘Be on the alert!’” (Mar 13.37).

*** Mar 13.1-4 §3: When Will These Things Be?**

According to Mark, the disciples ask:

1. When will these things be?
2. What will be the sign when all these things are about to be completed?

According to Matthew, they ask:

1. When will these things happen?

2. What will be the sign of your *parousia* and of the end of the age?⁴

According to Luke, they ask:

1. When will these things be?
2. What will be the sign that these things are about to happen?

The word *all* in Mar 13.4, “the sign when **all** these things are about to be completed,” implies that the disciples had more on their minds than the destruction of the temple buildings affirmed by Jesus in Mar 13.2. This is confirmed by Matthew’s version in which the disciples also ask about the coming of Jesus and the end of the age. This means that either Jesus had further conversation with the disciples about these latter events as they walked across the Kidron valley and up the Mount of Olives, *or* that the disciples already associated the destruction of the temple with the apocalyptic events connected with Messiah’s disclosure to the nation and to the end of the age. The disciples could have understood a coming destruction of the temple from Dan 9.26, but it seems that if they had understood that passage, they would have also understood that Messiah had to be “cut off.” Jesus would momentarily point the disciples to the prophecy of Daniel, which implies that they had a familiarity with the book, yet Peter didn’t understand or believe that Jesus would be “cut off and have nothing” (Mat 16.21-22).

We must recall that the disciples did not expect Jesus to depart. Their question about His “coming” was about His *parousia*, i.e., His special “presence,” His glorious public disclosure as the King of Israel. We can paraphrase their questions then as, “How can the temple be destroyed? Aren’t you shortly going to manifest your glory as the Messianic King and inaugurate the golden age?”

Note that the disciples either anticipated only one sign that would presage the events they had in mind, or they asked about “the sign” in a collective sense.

⁴ Note the hendiadys: “your coming” and “the end of the age” are two aspects of the same climax of history.

*** Mar 13.5-13 §1: See To It That No One Misleads You**

Then Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one may mislead you; many *men* will come in the Name *that is* mine, saying, ‘I AM,’ and they will mislead many. But when you may hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; *this* must occur, but the End is not yet. For nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be earthquakes in place after place, *and* there will be famines; these *are the* beginning of birth pangs. But you watch yourselves! They will hand you over to sanhedrins and in synagogues you will be beaten, and before governors and kings you will be made to stand for My sake as a testimony to them. But it is necessary first *for* the gospel to be preached unto all the nations. And when they may arrest you, handing *you* over, do not be anxious beforehand *about* what you may say, but whatever may be given to you *all* in that hour, this speak, for it will not be you the ones speaking but the Holy Spirit. And brother will hand over brother unto death and a father a child, and children will rise up against parents and put them to death; and you will be hated by all because of my Name. But the one enduring unto *the* end, this *one* will be saved.

In Mar 13.5 we learn why Jesus shocked the disciples with so provocative a prediction as that of the temple's utter destruction. His purpose was pique the disciples' interest in the eschatological future, and to fortify them for the coming trials — trials that they were not expecting. Jesus foresaw the need to warn His disciples about:

- False messiahs, Mar 13.6, 21-23,
- Wars, Mar 13.7,
- Earthquakes, Mar 13.8,
- Famines, Mar 13.8,
- Persecution and betrayal, Mar 13.9-13,
- The time of unprecedented tribulation, Mar 13.19-20, and
- The temptation to become complacent,

all of which would intervene before His “coming” which the disciples mistakenly thought was imminent. It was for their good that Jesus told them

“everything in advance” (Mar 13.23), and His shocking words about the temple opened their minds to this vital instruction.

*** Mar 13.5-13 §2: The Name That Is Mine.**

Our Eng versions do not translate the definite article (the word *the*) before a substantives made definite by a possessive pronoun. Thus, in Mar 13.6 our Eng Bible does not include the Grk article when Jesus says, “Many will come in **the** name my” The Grk article always has significance, however, which of necessity it often lost in translation. In this case, the article may be the *simple article* distinguishing Christ’s name from other names, but it may also be what we call an article *par excellence*, indicating the name above all names. The likelihood of the latter is supported by Christ’s reference to the *Ego Eimi*. The article is also *kataphoric* referring to the name that Jesus is about to mention again in connection with persecution (Mar 13.13).

Jesus warned, “Many will come in my name saying, I AM.” As in most occurrences of the *Ego Eimi* (Ἐγώ εἰμι), our Eng versions add a pronoun, translating, “I am *He*.” The translators are correct in indicating that the false messiah’s will claim, “I am He,” that is, “I am that messiah you’ve been awaiting,” or “I am that Jesus you’ve been expecting to return.”⁵ Nevertheless, the addition of the pronoun obscures Jesus’ allusion to the Tetragrammaton, and thus also to the fact that many imposters, including the ultimate Antichrist, *will claim deity*.

*** Mar 13.5-13 §3: Nation Will Rise Up Against Nation.**

The verb ἐγείρω (ĕ-'yē-rō, *rise up*) is in the future passive. It is tempting to read this as meaning that nations will be “passively” moved to hostility toward one another by an invisible hand. However, when the passive form of ἐγείρω is used *intransitively*, it has a more active (or middle) meaning. In this case, the text presents the nations, as also the false Christs and false prophets of Mar 13.22, as rising up of their own accord.

⁵ Cf. Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman in Joh 4.26, ““I who speak to you am *He*” (Ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι).

The preposition translated “against,” ἐπὶ (ë-'pē), has a vast semantic field, of which only one of its twenty-one nuances listed in Louw-Nida is oppositional. Nevertheless, this rising up of “nation ἐπὶ nation” is not a rising up to confer with one another, nor a recovery of one nation based upon the help of another, but it is a rising up *against* one another in war.

*** Mar 13.5-13 § 4: The Beginning Of Birth Pangs.**

This metaphor, “the beginning of birth pangs” (ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων, är-'chē ò-'dē-nōn) is rooted in previous prophetic pronouncements (Isa 26.16-19; 66.6-9; Jer 6.22-24; 30.6-7) and carried forward by the apostles (1Th 5.1-3). In its greater prophetic context, the metaphor points both to the coming spiritual rebirth of Israel (Isa 66.8) and the dawning of the Day of the LORD (1Th 5.1-3), as well as to the unprecedented tribulation (the “hard labor”) that will occur *before* that Day (Jer 30.6-7; cf. Dan 12.1; Mar 13.19), but *after* the “birth pangs.” It is vital, therefore, that we take seriously the Lord’s instruction as to what are merely “birth pangs,” and *not* panic or otherwise act as if they signal the immediate commencement of the End Time.

*** Mar 13.5-13 §5: Persecution For The Sake Of Testimony.**

It may offend the sensibilities of Christians like us who are accustomed to religious freedom and economic prosperity, but God has always allowed his people to suffer for the sake of testimony. The conflicts and disasters of this world are windows of opportunity for God’s people to testify. The martyrdoms of the first few centuries of the Christian era resulted in so many new conversions, that early Christians said, “the blood of martyrs is seed!” Subsequent history has shown that Christianity has always thrived as a counter culture, but tends to become compromised and irrelevant in prosperity. This does not imply that we should seek conflict, martyrdom, or poverty, but only that we should fear prosperity more than we should fear persecution.

*** Mar 13.5-13 §6: The Gospel Preached *First* To All The Nations.**

This passage prompts several questions:

1. What is meant by *all the nations*?
2. In what sense is the preaching of the gospel necessary?
3. Before what event (“first”) must the gospel be preached?
4. Who is responsible for the task?
5. Has the task been completed?
6. Will God intervene to finish the task by sending angelic proclamation (Rev 14.6)?

The position of this verse in the narrative of Mar 13 makes it, at first reading, seem like a non sequitur. On the other hand, it does follow logically from the preceding verse if we read it as a reason why the disciples must accept a persecution as part of their commission. Still, the word “first” forces us to find a temporal antecedent, and this points us back to the original question of the disciples: “what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” In other words, complete fulfillment of the apocalyptic events must await the preaching of the gospel to all nations.

What then did Jesus mean by “all the nations”? Perhaps the first thing that we should notice is that this phrase “all the nations,” πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (‘pän-dä tä ’ëth-nē), points us back to the promises to Abraham and Isaac, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 22.18; 26.4; cf. Gen 18.18). I will say more about this below, but as to the identity of “all the nations,” the phrase would seem to be all inclusive and refer to all the nations whom God has made, and who “shall come and worship before [Him]” (Psa 86.9). On the other hand, Scripture repeatedly uses the phrase “all the nations” to refer to the Gentile nations surrounding Israel, i.e., those nations who have historically shown hostility toward Israel (Joe 3.2/4.2; 3.11/4.11; 3.12/4.12; Oba 1.15-16; Zec 12.3; 14.2), and among whom Jewish exiles and expatriates have been scattered (Isa 66.20; Jer 30.11; 31.10; Eze 11.14-17; 20.41; 28.25; 36.19-24). We realize, therefore, that while announcing good news to the nations was amply predicted by the prophets, the idea that it must occur *first* must have been quite counterintuitive to the disciples. They

assumed that Israel would be exalted in messianic glory *first*, and then the humbled nations would come to worship in Jerusalem, bringing expatriate Israelites with them (Isa 66.5-20). "All the nations," then, in this teaching of Jesus, meant: (1) Gentiles, and (2) the surrounding pagan nations that are full of antipathy toward Israel!⁶ While the disciples were slow to begin this international mission, they eventually (according to tradition) interpreted it to mean taking the gospel all the way to Britannia in the west and India in the east, as well as up into central Asia and all along the north of Africa. The spirit of the commission, implies, of course, that subsequent generations should take the gospel to all the other nations beyond the biblical world as well. However, Christ's statement in Mar 3.10 does not necessarily imply that every single nation of the planet earth will hear the gospel before the end of the age, and far less does it imply that every modern nation will be reached. It appears that at the apocalypse, there will still be "distant coastlands" that have not hear of the Lord's fame (Isa 66.19).

Now we can understand why the preaching of the gospel to all nations *was* and *is* necessary. It is necessary in general as the most important means through which all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham's Seed. It is also necessary, however, for Israel's final humbling and glorification. Israel must learn once and for all that God did not choose them because they were a mighty people (Deu 7.7), nor because they were particularly righteous (Deu 9.5), but for His own gracious purposes. Were Israel to be exalted in messianic glory before the Gentiles were grafted in, they would all too likely stumble in pride, and never fully grasp that God so loved *the world*.

Before what event(s), then, must the gospel be preached to all nations? If we only had Mark's version of the Olivet Discourse, we would have to say, "the gospel must first be preached to all the nations" before the destruction of the temple (referring back to the disciples original question in Mar 13.4), *or* before the false messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes and persecutions of the

⁶ Paul felt that in his time the gospel had already been made known to all the nations and proclaimed to all creation (Rom 16.25-26; Col 1.5-6, 23).

“birth pangs” described in the immediately preceding verses (Mar 13.6-9). If this were the meaning of Christ’s words, then we would have to conclude that the prediction and implied mandate of the gospel being preached to all nations was fulfilled by the time of the Roman destruction of AD 70,⁷ or at the latest by the time of the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation (Mar 13.14).⁸ However, the Olivet Discourse cannot be properly understood until the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke are combined together. In Matthew’s version, Jesus said, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Mat 24.14). By “the end” Jesus meant, “the end of the age” (Mat 24.3).⁹ We must conclude then, that the gospel will and must be preached to all nations right up until the moment of the future parousia.

If this is the case, we must also conclude that the task of gospel proclamation has not yet been completed, at least not in an absolute sense. It may be that the gospel has *already* been proclaimed “to all the nations” to such an extent that further proclamation is no longer a prerequisite for “the end,”¹⁰ but it has not been adequately proclaimed to the current generation, and so for Christ’s sake, and out of love for humanity, we must continue preaching it. Up to this moment, the responsibility for gospel proclamation and the making of disciples from all nations belongs to the followers of Jesus. The day may come when the task will be taken up by angels (Rev 14.6), but until then, the responsibility belongs to us who love our Lord Jesus.

*** Mar 13.5-13 §7: Can We Hasten Christ’s Coming?**

Peter speaks of “looking for and hastening the coming day of God,” (2Pe 3.12). Since Jesus says that the gospel must “first be preached to all the nations”

⁷ This would imply that by “all the nations” Christ meant the nations of the Roman world.

⁸ Preterists interpret the “abomination of desolation” as referring to the past Roman desolation of Jerusalem. This interpretation implies that by “all the nations” Jesus referred to the nations of the Roman world. It further implies that the preaching of the gospel to these nations was fulfilled by AD 70.

⁹ It astounds me that preterists can interpret prophecy pertaining to “the end of the age” as having been fulfilled in AD 70, and say that Jesus returned at that time by way of judgment upon the Jewish nation!

¹⁰ Trans World Radio alone has almost completely blanketed the globe with gospel broadcasts.

(Mar 13.10), “and then the end will come” (Mat 24.14), does that mean that the sooner we preach the gospel to all nations, the sooner Christ will return? The answer is Yes and No.

On the one hand, the Father has sovereignly fixed the times and seasons of His plan for Israel and the eschatological kingdom on earth (Act 1.6-7).¹¹ Furthermore, Christ's statements (about the preaching of the gospel to the nations before the end) in and of themselves are simply prophetic declarations that said preaching will occur, and neither explicitly assign responsibility for that preaching nor promise that the preaching will affect the eschatological time table. Let us recall that the eschatological events of the End Time will be completed “as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people” (Dan 12.7). God forbid that we should try to hasten the Lord's coming by joining Antichrist in the humbling of Israel! Likewise, God's apocalyptic vengeance upon evil will not occur until the full number of God's servants are martyred (Rev 6.10-11). We will certainly not try to affect the eschatological timetable by persecuting our own fellow believers!

On the other hand, Scripture tells us that certain events are contingent upon others. For example, “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” will “not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed” (2Th 2.1-3). Also, Peter seems to make the return of Jesus contingent upon the repentance of his contemporary Jews (Act 3.19-21).¹² To be clear, though, the contingency of the Lord's coming upon preceding events, does not mean that the timetable of His coming can be altered; it only means that God has sovereignly established a sequence for the eschatological events.

Nevertheless, from a human point of view, if the gospel must first be preached to all nations, and if the Lord is delaying “the promise of His coming” until all His elect come to repentance (2Pe 3.4-9), then it *seems* as if

¹¹ Ezra, of the pseudepigraphal Fourth Book of Ezra (4 Esdras) speculates that it is because of Israel's ungodliness that the eschatological threshing and rewards are delayed. The angel Uriel answers that a woman cannot hold a child in her womb after the time of gestation is fulfilled, and neither will the eschatological events be delayed beyond their appointed time (4 Ezra 4.38-43).

¹² Rabbinical lore as well has proposed a number of prerequisites for Messiah's coming, such as Israel repenting for just one day, or keeping a single Sabbath in the proper way (Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate *Ta'anit* 1.2.5[R,T]).

we can hasten His coming by getting our part of the program done. Perhaps the reality is that a global renewal of zeal in the Church to “make disciples of all nations” will be a sign that the Father’s set time for Christ’s coming (Mar 13.32) is fast approaching.

*** Mar 13.5-13 §8: The Gracious Partnership.**

God could have accomplished the global proclamation of the gospel by angelic agency (cf. Rev 14.6), and finished the job in days or even hours. He also, like Pharaoh demanding that the Israelites gather their own straw with which to make bricks, could have ordained that His servants proclaim the gospel and testify to Christ without any divine help. Thankfully, our God is the anti-Pharaoh, the opposite of an oppressor: He never assigns us an impossible task without providing us with the help we need. Still, it is a gracious thing for God to condescend to partner with human beings, in the person of His own Holy Spirit, in doing the work of the Great Commission. Preaching the gospel, and maintaining a faithful testimony in the face of persecution, is never easy, but none of us can excuse ourselves from the commission by saying that it was too great a task for us. It *is* too great a task for us, but God has given us His Spirit, by whose omniscient and almighty power we will accomplish the task.

*** Mark 13.5-13 §9: The Flesh And The Devil Against The Gospel.**

Many of my American contemporaries, having experienced a radical transformation through the new birth, attempted to share the gospel with their non-church or nominally Christian parents, only to be rebuffed for implying that they were somehow more holy than their progenitors. This sometimes resulted in a lasting awkwardness of relationship between child and parent, but none of my peers’ fathers and mothers ever *dreamed* of putting their gospel-believing children to death! Yet, Saudi Arabian exchange students who lived with us for a time told me that they could not become Christians, because if they did, and returned to their homeland, their parents would put poison in their food.

How can this heartlessness between parents and children (and between brothers), which Paul warned would characterize the last days (2Ti 3.3; cf. Rom 1.31), even be possible? The shock, once the implications of Paul's teaching sinks in, is that the parental affection that most people experience in "civilized" nations is the deviation from the norm. The natural bent of fallen human nature is so utterly selfish, such that apart from God's grace, all parents and their children would turn against each other, if one or the other began proclaiming the gospel. Natural, fallen man *cannot abide* the thought of relinquishing his personal autonomy to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and no sinner wants to hear that he is not good enough to find favor with whatever God may exist.

Thankfully, what theologians call the "common grace" of God is at work in our world, restraining the wickedness of our race lest it utterly destroy itself. However, where individuals or societies persist in evil, God will finally "give them over" to their profound selfishness (Rom 1.24,26,28), and then gross wickedness occurs.

When it comes to resisting the proclamation of the gospel, though, the selfish opposition of fallen man is exacerbated by the demonic hatred toward God and man. Human beings are far more susceptible to demonic suggestion than we care to admit. Human anger is frequently fanned into rage by invisible spirits whispering to the human mind. If such a phenomenon happens at all, it is bound to occur when the gospel, "the power of God for salvation" (Rom 1.16), is being proclaimed. No one should be surprised if he or she is persecuted for proclaiming the biblical gospel (summarized by Paul in 1Co 15.1-8).

*** Mark 13.5-13 §10: Hated By All.**

In fulfillment of Christ's words, the disciples were first hated by the Jewish religious establishment. This was the "they" who would have the disciples "flogged in the synagogues" (Mar 13.9; Act 5.40; 2Co 11.25). The Jewish religious establishment resisted the proclamation of the gospel, not only in Jerusalem and Judea, but to "the ends of the earth," accusing the disciples of Jesus before "governors and kings" (e.g., Act 24-26). However, the antipathy

toward the gospel was by no means limited to Jewish religionists, but sprung up wherever the implications of the gospel for competing religions was recognized (e.g., Act 19.23-41). Today, the gospel and the Christians who proclaim it are hated by radical Buddhists, radical Muslims and the New Atheists, all of whom recognize that the Christian religion and their own are mutually nullifying.

* Mark 13.5-13 §11: In What Sense Will Those Who Endure “Be Saved”?

Biblical usage of the phrase “to the end” (εἰς τέλος, *ēs 'těl-ōs*; Mar 13.13; Mat 10.22; 24.13) shows that it means *to the utmost/uttermost* or *to the fullest extent* (cf. Joh 13.1 in NIVO; 1Th 2.16 in NAU). When a temporal period is in view, the phrase expresses this idea regardless of what terminus for the season may be in view. In other words, “the one who endures to the end,” is the one who endures no matter how much and how long it is required of him or her. Since the context here in the Olivet Discourse is the warning of coming persecution, “the one who endures to the end,” is the one who does not deny the testimony of Jesus no matter how hard the persecution becomes, and no matter how long it lasts. Since this kind of endurance may culminate in death (Mar 13.12), the salvation that Jesus promises (Mar 13.13) is not physical deliverance (i.e., healing, as in Mar 3.4; 5.23, 28, 34; 6.56), but eschatological salvation, i.e., acceptance by Christ when He comes in glory (Mar 8.34-38).

This does not imply that we save ourselves by our endurance. Rather, our faithfulness to Christ in the face of trials and persecutions demonstrates that He has saved us, and that His Holy Spirit is maintaining our faith.

* Mark 13.14-20 §1: The Abomination Of Desolation.

But when you may see the abomination of the desolation standing where it should not — let the one reading understand — then let those in Judea flee into the mountains, those upon the housetop let them not go down nor enter in to take anything out of their house, and the one in the field let him not turn back to the things behind to pick up

his coat. But woe to the *women* having a *child* in the womb and to the *women* nursing in those days. But pray that it may not happen in winter. For those days will be a tribulation such as has not happened [the like] from *the* beginning of *the* creation which God created until now and never will happen *afterwards*. And if *the* Lord did not shorten the days, all flesh would not be saved. But because of the elect whom He chose, He shortened the days.

Biblically speaking, an abomination (βδέλυγμα, 'vdě-lěg-mä) is anything detestable or hateful to God. As the MGK¹³ translates Pro 6.16, “επτὰ μάλιστα βδελύττεται η ψυχή αυτού”: “seven [things], indeed, His soul abominates.” The descriptor, “of desolation,” marks this particular abomination as one that will cause desertion, i.e., evacuation of the area where it occurs. For those who fail to vacate the area on their own initiative, the Lord admonishes, “let those in Judea flee into the mountains!” Why those in Judea? Because this abomination will occur in the place where “it must not” (ὄπου οὐ δεῖ, 'ōp-ü ü dē). Matthew’s account clarifies that this location is “the Holy Place,” i.e., the first room of the temple sanctuary.

What does the abomination of desolation do in the Holy Place? The perfect participle (masculine in Mark, neuter in Matthew) serves as a stative adjective: the abomination of desolation is a *standing thing*. Rev 13.14-15 tells us what this standing thing will be: an image of the Beast (i.e., a statue of the Antichrist) with power to speak. This is reminiscent of the great statues of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses erected in the pagan temples of old, some of which were purported to have supernatural powers. Though the Revelation does not specify that the image will be erected in the temple, it will not surprise us if the Man of Lawlessness, who “takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God” (2Th 2.4) will place his own image where it will be visible to all who gaze in through the open doors of the temple sanctuary.

What will the image look like? The masculine participle in Mark that describes it as a standing thing, implies that it may have a masculine aspect (Matthew’s neuter participle points more to its inanimate nature). The fact

¹³ <http://biblehub.com/vam/proverbs/6.htm>

that the false prophet will give breath and speech to the image, implies that the image has a face, and the contextual emphasis in Rev 13 upon the mark and number of the Beast, and the number being “that of a man,” makes it likely that the image will be a statue of the man of lawlessness himself (even as Nebuchadnezzar once had a statue made of himself for the people to worship).

When this great statue is erected in the Holy Place, visible when the doors are open to those standing outside the sanctuary entrance, those still faithful to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will *immediately* flee the temple precincts as polluted ground. There will be no prolonged remonstrance or appeal to have the image removed, but an instant recognition that there can be no redress but from the Lord of hosts, and that the faithful are in mortal danger from the one who commits the abomination. Thus, the Lord said, “pray that your flight will not be ... on a Sabbath”; on whatever day the abomination of desolation appears, that is the day that the faithful must flee. The news of this statue, having been placed where it should not be, will spread instantly to all in the Judean region, and those with discernment will flee to the mountains, knowing that war, and possibly even judgment from heaven, is imminent.

In Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus said that people would know that Jerusalem's desolation was near when they see her “surrounded by armies” (Luk 21.20). Luke's version does not mention the abomination as such, but implies that the surrounding of the city by armies will indicate that the abomination of desolation is about to be set up. This makes sense, of course, since Antichrist will know that setting up an idol in the Jerusalem temple will never be permitted by the Jewish authorities, except under the threat of military destruction.¹⁴

This futurist understanding of Luk 21.20 does not negate the fact that it warned Christians to flee the city when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman legions in AD 70. Whether or not the actions of the Roman army in

¹⁴ It is an open secret today that Israel is a nuclear power. Because of the current strength of Israel's military, the eventual domination of Israel by Antichrist must come as the result of intrigue, and a political “frog in the kettle” scenario. Some in Israel will foolishly receive the Man of Lawlessness (Joh 5.43).

connection with the temple at that time can be construed as “an abomination of desolation,” the invasion and destruction of AD 70 certainly foreshadows the invasion and ultimate abomination of desolation still to come.

*** Mark 13.14-20 §2: Where It Should Not Be.**

For the man of lawlessness to take “his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God” (2Th 2.4), and for his image to be erected in the Holy Place, of course requires a Jewish temple standing in Jerusalem. Interpretations to the contrary depend upon a preterist interpretation of these prophecies as already fulfilled, or upon interpreting “the temple of God” in 2Th 2.4 as referring to the Church (a belief that would also probably involve replacement theology). A futurist interpretation of the eschatological Scriptures assures us that, with the Jewish nation reestablished in its homeland in 1948, the rebuilding of a Jewish temple in Jerusalem is imminent.

*** Mark 13.14-20 §3: Let The One Reading Understand.**

Bullinger understood the *one reading* as idiom for *expositor*, the one who reads publicly and comments on the words to an assembly.¹⁵ This is consistent with the usage of the same participle, ἀναγινώσκων, in Rev 1.3 (and probably with its meaning in Hab 2.2). The reader/expositor must take care that he understands the words correctly and does not distort their meaning to his audience (cf. Jam 3.1).

Commentators continue to discuss whether it was Jesus Himself who gave the admonition, or whether it was inserted by Mark (and Matthew?). The NAU prints “(let the reader understand)” in black rather than red to indicate that the committee behind this version understands these words as *not* those of Jesus. If we understand the “reader” in view to be an expositor in a public gathering, then it would certainly seem odd for Jesus to have

¹⁵ Ethelbert William Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, (London; New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode; E. & J. B. Young & Co., 1898), p. 851.

inserted the parenthetical admonition Himself (unless He saw that one of the disciples was writing down His words as He spoke them).

Commentators also continue to discuss the precise meaning of the admonition. Is it an admonition to understand what the “abomination of desolation” is, or where it will appear, or is it a warning to discern precisely the moment when the people of God must flee? At the very least, the instruction, “let the reader understand,” should send the expositor back to the book of Daniel to learn all he can about the “abomination of desolation.”

*** Mark 13.14-20 §4: Those In Judea Must Flee.**

The warning specifically to those in Judea reminds us of the Israel-centric focus of the Great Tribulation, and of the fact that the final crisis occurs at Jerusalem. It's not those in London or New York who are to flee.

*** Mar 13.14-20 §5: Prophetic But Literal.**

The biblical prophets, including our Lord Jesus, had ways to indicate that their predictions were to be understood as referring to real events that would occur in the normal sphere of human life. In this passage, Jesus signals that the abomination of desolation, and the tribulation it will spark, will not be invisible, spiritual crises, but will be real socio-political upheavals. Were Jesus predicting only invisible, mystical events, He would not have expressed woe in regard to the pregnant and nursing women “in those days,” nor encouraged the disciples to pray “that it may not happen in the winter.” Whether or not one believes that Christ prophesied these things, and whether or not one believes that they will come to pass, the reader of Mark must recognize that Jesus is portrayed as predicting an apocalyptic crisis that will occur in the visible world, and that will bring life-threatening danger to the inhabitants of Judea.

*** Mar 13. 14-20 §6: Woe To Pregnant And Nursing Women.**

This exclamation of woe provides no further directive nor counsel, nor is it an exclamation about something that can be avoided. In some respects, people will still see *very normal* societal conditions during the End Time; e.g., people

will still be marrying and being given in marriage, Luk 17.26-30. There will not be a time when the Great Tribulation can occur without pregnant and nursing mothers living in Judea. Therefore, this exclamation by the Lord seems to have expressed His genuine grief at the prospect of expectant and nursing mothers having to experience the horror of fleeing for their lives when the abomination of desolation appears. In this genuine grief we see His true humanity, i.e., His full identification with suffering people, as well as the real sorrow of God's own heart.

*** Mar 13. 14-20 §7: Christ's Limited Foreknowledge.**

As part of His kenosis, Christ kept His divine omniscience and foreknowledge in abeyance. In the Olivet Discourse, He said regarding the appearance of the abomination of desolation, “pray that it may not happen in the winter.” In Matthew's version, the Lord narrows His concern down to the day of the week: “pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath” (Mat 24.20; once again reminding us of the Israel-centric nature of this prophecy). Had He exercised His divine omniscience regarding chronology, He might have instead said something like, “Thankfully this will not occur in winter or on a Sabbath,” or “Tragically, this will occur in winter.” Instead, His expression of unawareness regarding the season when the abomination of desolation will appear, anticipates His explicit statement in Mar 13.32, “But of that day or hour [of the coming of the Son of Man] no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father *alone*.”

*** Mar 13.14-20 §8: An Unprecedented Tribulation.**

How bad can the coming tribulation be? Apparently it has the potential to destroy “all flesh.” This phrase, *πᾶσα σὰρξ* ('pā-sā sārks), is the most inclusive in Scripture to describe the totality of the animal kingdom. Depending on context, it refers to the sum of all people and animals (Gen 7.21), or less broadly to the entire human race (Gen 6.12; Isa 66.23; Gal 2.16), or — in its most limited usage — to the redeemed upon whom God pours His Spirit (Acts 2.17). For the Lord to say, then, that apart from God's intervention “not would be saved all flesh,” could mean:

1. All animals and people on the planet would perish.
2. All animals and people in the Holy Land would perish.
3. All people on the planet would perish.
4. All people in the Holy Land would perish.

The fourth alternative is the most likely meaning, but the phrase *πᾶσα σὰρξ* is meant to convey that the potential for loss of life will be vast.

Certainly at the culmination of the Great Tribulation “those slain by the LORD will be many” (Isa 66.16; Rev 19.17-21). However, the potential loss of life for which the tribulation time is shortened, surely refers to the casualties that would occur at the hand of, or because of the actions of, the False Christ responsible for the setting up of the abomination of desolation. He, the Antichrist, will be a man of war who worships “a god of fortresses” (Dan 11.38), and under whose regime “those who have insight among the people ... will fall by the sword, by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days” (Dan 11.33). Yet, with the divine shortening of the days of this tribulation, “at that time ... everyone found written in the book will be rescued” (Dan 12.1).

* Mar 13.14-20 §9: The Shortening Of Days.

That the Lord “shortened the days” of the Great Tribulation, reminds us that He has it within His power to have eliminated those days altogether. That God has *not* decreed that the End would come without the Antichrist, and without the Great Tribulation, implies that He has a purpose in allowing these End-Time horrors.

Just as mysteriously, but with evident purpose, the LORD sent a plague upon Israel in response to David’s sin of numbering the people (2Sa 24). After seventy thousand men died up and down the length of Israel, and the destroying angel was about to destroy Jerusalem, “the LORD relented” and said, “It is enough!” Perhaps in this same way, when the armies of Antichrist surround Jerusalem, after devastating the country from the valley of Jezreel down to Judea, and when they are about to completely destroy Jerusalem, the LORD will see that His purposes have been accomplished, and He will shorten the days of tribulation by declaring, “It is enough!”

*** Mar 13.21-23 §1: False Messiahs And False Prophets.**

And then if anyone may say to you, “Look, here *is* the Christ, see, there *he is*,” do not believe *it*; for false Christs and false prophets will come and they will give signs and wonders with the purpose to mislead, if *it were* possible, the elect; but you watch out: I have told you everything in advance.

The verb ἐγερθήσονται (ě-yěr-'thě-sōn-dě) is passive, but when used intransitively it conveys an active (or middle) meaning. Though false Christs and false prophets undoubtedly act in response to demonic suggestion (even if unwittingly), they are well aware and self-invested in their conscious thoughts and actions, and will not be able to plead, “the devil made me do it!”

*** Mar 13.21-23 §2: Targeting The Elect.**

The fact that false Christs and false prophets will especially seek to deceive the elect helps us understand why the Lord will shorten “those days ... for the sake of the elect” (Mar 13.20). But who are these elect? *Elect* simply means *chosen*, and in view of the Israel-centric character of the Bible in general, and of the Olivet discourse in particular, our first thought as to the identity of the elect should be, *they are Jewish people, members of the “chosen people,” Israel*. It is certainly possible to maintain an emphasis upon Israelites in the use of this term, but in Mar 13.27 we see that the elect are those whom the Lord’s angels will gather to himself. In other words, though the particular elect in view in this discourse may be Israelites, they are *saved* Israelites, Christian believers who will be caught up in the rapture. Indeed, in Mat 22.1-14, in the parable of the wedding feast, we find that the elect are those brought into the wedding feast by grace, even if they are not those who were first invited. In other words, the elect in view in these passages may be Israelites, but they are a subset of Israel, those Israelites who have believed and been redeemed, “everyone who is found written in the book” (Dan 12.1).

* Mar 13.24-27 §1: The Stars Will Be Falling.

But in those days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give her brightness, and the stars will be falling out of the sky, and the powers — the ones in the heavens — will be shaken. And then they will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and *great* glory. And then He will send the angels, and He will gather the elect out of the four winds, from the end of earth as far as the end of heaven.

The description of the stars falling is probably phenomenological. In other words, what the prophets describe is probably *the appearance* of stars falling out of the heavens, rather than distant suns actually changing their galactic positions so as to move out of earthly view. The appearance of falling stars at the Lord's coming may involve a meteor shower. However, the *darkening* of the stars (Isa 13.10; Joe 2.10-11; 3.15; Rev 8.12) requires a different explanation. This darkening, if temporary, may be a hiding of the stars from human view by smoke or cloud. However, by using a periphrastic future (the future form of the verb *to be*, together with a present participle), Mark indicates the durative or iterative nature of this celestial event¹⁶: “the stars **will continue to be falling** out of the heaven,” or “the stars will fall, **one after another**, from out of the heaven.” If this is a description of ontological reality, then our universe will experience radical changes indeed at the Lord's coming!

* Mar 13.24-27 §2: The Powers That Are In The Heavens.

In Mar 13.24-25 (as in Mat 24.29), we have a most interesting parallelism:

The sun will be darkened,
And the moon will not give her brightness,
And the stars will be falling out of the sky,
And the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

¹⁶ See C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book Of New Testament Greek*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 16-18.

We see in this parallelism that as *moon* corresponds to *sun*, so *powers* corresponds to *stars*. Thus, as the *moon* is not the *sun* (though having a certain relationship to it), so the *powers* referred to are not the *stars*, but something other.

Now, the phrase “power(s) of the heaven(s)” is an important one in the LXX, as it translates the Hebrew **צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם** (tsə-'vā hä-shä-'mä-yīm, “host of heaven,” 2Ki 17.16; 21.3,5; 23.4,5; 2Ch 18.18; Ode 12.15; Dan 4.35; 8.10). The “host of heaven,” i.e., “army of heaven,” sometimes refers to the spirits inhabiting heavenly places (2Ch 18.18; Ode 12.15; Dan 4.35), or more narrowly and metaphorically to earthly luminaries (Dan 8.10; cf. Rev 12.4). However, it usually refers to the celestial bodies worshipped by idolaters (2Ki 23.5). As *mammon* refers to money deified, the “powers of the heavens” refers to the sun, moon and stars as objects of worship.

There is another aspect of Mar 13.24-25 (and Mat 24.29), however, that escapes our attention unless we read the Grk text: While the word for heaven, οὐρανός (ü-rä-'nōs), occurs 18 times in Mar, this is the only Marcan passage where **both the singular and plural forms appear together**. The word οὐρανός, as its Heb counterpart **שָׁמַיִם** (shä-'mä-yīm), has two fundamental meanings: (1) the dome of the sky (firmament) in which the birds fly and the stars and planets are hung, and (2) the compartmented spiritual realm in which God and spirits dwell. Usually context tells us whether the sky or the spiritual heavens are in view when the NT uses οὐρανός. Also, when the sky (with its stars and planets) is meant, the NT writers often use the singular of οὐρανός (Mat 16.2), but they also use the singular (less often) for the abode of God (Mat 6.9). Conversely, the NT writers normally use the plural of οὐρανός for the abode of God or His spiritual kingdom (Mat 4.17; Mar 11.26), but can also use the plural for the

material heavens (Heb 1.10), and even to signify *all the heavens*, i.e., the material and spiritual heavens together.¹⁷ There is no hard and fast rule for using the singular or plural to distinguish one kind of heaven from the other. What is a NT writer to do, then, when contrasted heavens are in view in the same passage? The answer seems to be: use the singular for the material heavens, and the plural for the spiritual heavens.¹⁸

Therefore, while the OT phrase, “powers of the heavens,” usually referred to stars and planets as objects of worship, Jesus, in the Olivet Discourse, seems to have distinguished those powers as existing in the spiritual heavens in contrast to the stars placed in the material heavens. For the “powers of the heavens” to be shaken, then, implies a blow against “the prince of the power of the air” and against “the rulers ... powers ... the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 2.2; 6.12).¹⁹ Interestingly, the verb *shaken* in Mar 13.25, translates σαλεύω (sä-'lëv-ō), which the LXX uses to translate the Heb word in 2Ki 17.20 that can be rendered *humiliate*. All this accords well with what we know about the coming culmination of Serpent's humiliation (“On your belly you will go, and dust you will eat,” Gen 3.14) when he is bound for 1,000 years to await his final destruction (Rev 20.2-3).

¹⁷ I do not want to obscure the fact that the “spiritual heavens” have concrete and material aspects, but only to distinguish them from the material atmosphere and from outer space with its stars and planets.

¹⁸ This also is difficult rule to prove as a hard and fast, because sometimes the singular and plural are used in proximity by some authors for the very same kind of heaven. However, for instances where the singular and plural of οὐρανός occur together with an apparent distinction, see: Mat 5.18-20; 13.31-32; 24.29,30-31,35-36; Luk 10.20-21; Act 7.55-56; Heb 12.25-26.

¹⁹ The view that the “powers of the heavens” refers to spiritual entities in this passage, is not unheard of (it is supported by a footnote in the NET, for example), it is the minority view, with the majority understanding the “powers” as synonymous with stars. At the very least, however, we should understand “the powers of the heavens” as referring to the stars (and planets) *as objects of worship*.

Nevertheless, the idea that the *spiritual powers* will be shaken, does not negate an impact upon the *material stars*, as described above (Mar 13.24-27 §1). Whatever changes occur with the stars and planets, or their arrangement, will *demonstrate their mutability*, and serve as a rebuke to any who worship them. As the celestial bodies are shaken, they will be seen to be subject to that greater Power Who is about to shake all things “so that whose things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb 12.26-27).

* Mar 13.24-27 §3: Who Will See The Son Of Man Coming?

In Mar 13.26, the third person verb, *they will see*, lacks a near antecedent unless it refers to “the powers that are in the heavens” of the preceding verse. Those powers will certainly witness the parousia, but Matthew’s version tells us that “all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and **they will see** the Son of Man coming ...” (Mat 24.30). “All the tribes of the earth” (αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς, ě fē-’lě tēs yēs) in the LXX is roughly equivalent to “all the Gentile nations” (Gen 12.3; 28.14; Psa 71.17), and sometimes speaks of Gentiles in contradistinction to the people of Israel (Eze 20.32). However, the words *see* and *mourn* together allude to Zec 12.10.²⁰ Therefore, we should probably translate Mat 24.30 Israel-centrally with, “then all the peoples in [and around] the [holy] land will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man” In other words, the “they” who will see, in Mar 13.26, are to be understood, with reference to Zechariah’s prophecy, as those who pierced Him (Zec 12.10; Joh 19.37), “the Jew first and also ... the Greek [= Roman].” Zechariah names “the house of David and ... inhabitants of Jerusalem” in particular as seeing Him, but “just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mat 24.27), and thus Rev 1.7 confirms that “every eye will see Him.” Nevertheless, we must not fail to see that, in His

²⁰ William L. Lane, in his *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark* (1974), notes that the indefinite plural “will see” is often used in the Aramaic language for the simple passive: “And then the Son of Man will be seen.” To interpret the operative verb in the passive sense, however, is to obscure the intentional allusion to Zec 12.10.

Olivet Discourse, Jesus prophetically confirmed the coming fulfilment of Zec 12.10, i.e., the promise that unbelieving Israel will see their pierced Messiah, and be brought to repentance.

*** Mar 13.24-27 §4: Great Power And Glory.**

The Grk text has a construction called *zeugma*, “yoking,” in which the single fem. adj., πολλῆς (pō-'lēs, “great, much”), is yoked to two feminine nouns, δυνάμεως (dē-'nä-mē-ōs) and δόξης ('dōks-ēs), “power” and “glory.” In this case the construction is a *mesozeugma* since the yoke (the adj.) falls between the two nouns. The Grk word order is, “power great and glory,” with the effect of emphasizing the greatness attached to both. The Lord will be seen coming “with great power, and with glory equally great!”

*** Mar 13.24-27 §5: The Great Gathering.**

“From the four winds” means “from every direction,” of course, and evokes a four-cornered aerial view of the Holy Land, or the larger biblical (Mediterranean) world (Isa 11.12; Eze 7.2; Rev 7.1; 20.8; cf. Dan 7.2). More importantly, it alludes to — but is not confined to — the promised regathering of Israel (Zec 2).²¹

One cannot help but perceive the all-inclusiveness of this great gathering. The words, “from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven,” are a merism, expressing the totality of all places where the elect could possibly be found. The Lord’s angels will gather all His elect from the earth, and bring all His elect from heaven. Paul is in full accord with this all inclusiveness when he describes the rapture as first reuniting the saints from heaven with their resurrected bodies, and then catching up those who are still alive at Christ’s coming, even as their bodies are changed into immortal ones (1Th 4.13-18; 1Co 15.50-55).

This should comfort the weak and give pause to elitists. No authentic believer will be left behind, even if his feeble works are burned up, and he is saved “as one escaping through the flames” (1Co 3.11-15). This should also

²¹ The promised regathering of Israel from the lands of their dispersion is alluded to by Paul in his mention of “our gathering to Him,” in 2Th 2.1.

comfort the elect Israelite of the End Time, whether a believer or pre-believer, who fears that he will somehow miss out on messianic blessings since he lives in the dispersion, far from *haaretz*. The LORD is about to reverse the dispersion. Through Zechariah He said, "I have dispersed you as the four winds of the heavens" (Zec 2.6), but now Messiah says that His angels "will gather together His elect from the four winds" (Mar 13.27).

*** Mar 13.28-33 §1: Summer Is Near.**

Now from the fig tree learn the parable: When already her branch may become tender, and she may put forth the leaves, you know that the summer is near. Thus also you, when you may see these things happening, you know that He is near at *the* doors. Amen, I say to you that this generation may not at all pass away until which *time* all these things may occur. The heaven and the earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away. But about those days or the hour no one knows if not the Father: neither the angels in heaven nor the Son. See *that* you keep awake [and pray], for you do not know when the critical time is.

The striking thing about the parable of the fig tree is that it ends on a positive note: summer. While summer may not be the happiest time in regions of extreme heat or humidity, it is the time of fruitful growth and even harvest in the Holy Land. Thus, the parable gives us hope that the Lord will find His people serving Him fruitfully when He comes.

*** Mar 13.28-33 §2: These Things.**

The NIV Study Bible states that "These things' could be the signs listed in verses 5–23 that precede the destruction of Jerusalem and/or the signs listed in verses 24–25 that precede the end of the age." There is some ambiguity since the phrase ἐγγύς ἐστί (ēn-'gyēs ěs-tĕn) could mean either that "He is near," or that "it is near." However, what immediately precedes this verse, as well as what follows it, puts the emphasis upon the coming of the Son of Man, and so "these things" that indicate an imminent event, are the harbingers of

the parousia.²² R. T. France, on the contrary, logically connects the ambiguous “it is near” to the original question of the disciples regarding the destruction of the Temple, “when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?” (Mar 13.4).²³ However, the Anglican (and I assume amillennial) France failed to take into account the fuller teaching of the Olivet Discourse (of which Mark gives an abbreviated version), and Christ’s intent to warn both the present generation of the Roman destruction, and also a future generation about the final siege that would be prefigured by the Roman one — France did not see a personal coming to earth of Jesus in Mar 13.26, but only Christ’s enthronement in heaven. Nor did he see the rapture in Mar 13.27, but the missionary work of angels in the Church age.

*** Mar 13.28-33 §3: Heaven And Earth Will Pass Away.**

As in Gen 1.1, the phrase “heaven and earth” is a merism referring to the totality of the material universe. That the present universe will pass away is consistent with God’s promise to “create new heavens and a new earth” (Isa 65.17; 66.22; 2Pe 3.13), and is confirmed by the Revelation (Rev 21.1). Students of Scripture continue to debate just what is meant by the “passing away” of the present heaven and earth, but it will certainly involve a demonstration of God’s omnipotence, even as the first creation was. In this light, we must not fail to grasp the magnitude of Christ’s claim that His words, i.e., His message to mankind, including the teaching and predictions of the Olivet Discourse, *will certainly not pass away*. This is either the claim of a madman, or of a holy prophet confident that the Almighty would not let his words fail. But Jesus could not be a holy prophet unless He was all that He claimed to be, namely, the divine Son of Man from heaven. The Almighty would not let His words fail, or ever disappear from human consciousness,

²² To be “at the doors/gates” would seem to imply the imminence of a personal arrival rather than of an impersonal event, but scholars argue about whether the figure of speech can be constrained to a personal event.

²³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), .

because they *are* the words of the Almighty spoken through His own Logos who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Indeed, the complete words and works of countless prophets and philosophers are lost forever (except in the memory of God), yet few of their messages have been opposed as virulently as the message of Jesus. With all the persecutions against Christians through the centuries, and all the attempts to suppress the Bible and biblical literacy, Christ's words continue to run throughout the world unchained (2Ti 2.9).

*** Mar 13.28-33 §4: That Day Or Hour.**

We understand intuitively that Jesus uses the phrase “day or hour” to mean “the precise time or moment.” The phrase implies that there *is* a precise moment of the parousia, even if it is only known by the Father. Foreknowledge logically implies determination (whether by divine decree or by a necessary chain of cause and effect). It would seem, therefore, that the precise moment of the parousia is set and will not be changed. This, in turn, implies that the *hastening (hurrying)* of 2Pe 3.12 should be understood as *eagerly seeking for or desiring* the Day of God, more than attempting to influence its timing.

*** Mar 13.28-33 §5: “No One Knows, Not Even ... the Son.”**

The Son being in a state of not knowing (*οἶδεν*) something must be an aspect of His mysterious *kenosis* (Phil 2.7), in which He keeps His divine attributes in abeyance. We must note, though, that Jesus emphasizes His relationship with the Father in His statement about not knowing. Jesus could have said, “no one knows, not even ... the **Christ**, but **God alone**.” This alternate wording would convey the same fact, but without reference to His particular relationship to the Father. In emphasizing the Son-Father relationship, He implies that His not knowing has to do with that relationship. In other words, Jesus keeps His foreknowledge of the precise time of the Parousia in abeyance *in obedience* to the Father.

We can infer, then, that *it is the Father's will* that no one know the precise time of the Parousia. Why? History demonstrates that the perverse heart of man will always abuse such knowledge. Were the precise time of the Parousia known to man, people would cast off responsibilities on the one hand, and with a false sense of temporary security give themselves over to debauchery on the other. One of our fellow students confessed that, as an unregenerate church person, he avidly studied biblical eschatology to try to get a sense of how long he could live a compromised life before he would need to repent in time for the Parousia. The perversity of the human heart is revealed, of course, in the tendency to fear the Parousia more than the ever present possibility of sudden death.

We know that Jesus would not abuse foreknowledge as fleshly man does, nor would we expect the holy angels to, but by foregoing the foreknowledge of the precise time of the Parousia, they set an example for us of submission to the will of the Father.

Augustine, building on the teaching of Hilary of Poitiers, interpreted Jesus' "not knowing" as a figurative expression "with no other meaning than that He, by concealing [the knowledge], caused others not to know it"²⁴ In other words, Augustine proposed that Jesus *did know* the precise time of the Parousia, but said figuratively that He *did not* in order to convey that it was inappropriate for Him to convey that knowledge. This "figurative language" theory is attractive, but it fails because Jesus was not speaking only of His own not knowing. If Christ had said, "But of that day or hour the Son does not know, but the Father alone," the theory could work. However, Jesus grouped Himself with all men and angels in His statement of not knowing. Therefore, to say that Jesus meant that He *did know* but could not appropriately reveal that knowledge, is to imply that others also knew but could not reveal it. We must accept that in some real sense Jesus, in His humanity, held His knowledge of the "hour" in abeyance, while in no way implying that He lacks omniscience so far as the full expression of His deity is concerned.

²⁴ Augustine *Let* 180.3. Hilary *De Trin* 9.58-62.

*** Mar 13.28-33 §6: Textual Variant “And Pray.”**

The current text of the GNT does not include the phrase, *και προσευχεσθε*, “and pray,” a phrase which does appear in the KJV, and NKJV, and is footnoted as a variant in the ESV. The committee that assembled the United Bible Societies’ (UBS) Greek New Testament, 4th Revised Edition, felt that the phrase was a likely scribal addition, perhaps copied inadvertently from Mar 14.38, the passage in which Jesus in Gethsemane warned his disciples, “Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation ...” Certainly Mar 13.33 makes sense *without* the phrase, “and pray.” Furthermore, prayer is surely implied in the command to “see *that* you keep awake” without having to be explicitly stated. On the other hand, the phrase is found in very ancient Grk mss, including Sinaiticus (4th c.), Alexandrinus (5th c.), Ephraemi (5th c.), Freerianus (4th/5th c.), and a great many later mss, but is missing from Vaticanus (4th c.) and from Codex Bezae (5th c.). The UBS committee judged that it was easier to explain the phrase *being added* to many mss, than it was to explain why it would be missing from Vaticanus, etc. A confident decision whether to include or exclude the phrase, “and pray,” is beyond my expertise.

*** Mar 13.34-37 §1: Prefiguring The Great Commission.**

It is like a man abroad having left his household and having given his slaves the authority, to each one his task, he gave orders also to the doorkeeper that he may be awake. You, therefore, be awake for you do not know when the lord of the house comes, whether evening or midnight or cock crow or morning; may he not (having come suddenly) find you sleeping; and what to you I say to all I say: be awake.

With “the parable of the doorkeeper,” Jesus directs the minds of the disciples to the responsibility that will swiftly devolve upon them. Jesus is the master of the “household of faith” (Gal 6.10), the “household of God” (1Ti 3.15; Heb 10.21; 1Pe 4.17). He will soon be “a man abroad,” away from his earthly country, and He is about to delegate His authority to His servants for their designated tasks. We read about the accomplishment of this in Mat 28.18-20:

Jesus said to His disciples, “All authority has been given to me ... go therefore and make disciples ...” It’s easy when reading the Eng translation, “putting his slaves in charge, to each one his task,” to miss the idea of the delegation of authority (δοὺς τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐξουσίαν, thūs tēs 'thū-lēs äf-'tü tēn ěks-ü-'sē-än). In our vernacular, to be put in charge of a task (putting folding chairs away, for example) does not imply a transfer of authority. We must remember the context though. To be put someone in charge of *maintaining a household* does require a certain amount of delegated authority in order to freely access the property, to manage the household assets, and to organize the work.

*** Mar 13.34-37 §2: The Doorkeeper.**

Since Jesus gave the Olivet Discourse pointedly to the disciples who, through their inner circle, had asked Him what would presage the apocalyptic upheaval (Mar 13.3-4), the Lord in His parable singles out the doorkeeper from the other servants. When the master departs upon His journey, He commands the doorkeeper in particular to “be awake, stay on the alert.” With these words, Jesus plants a vital warning in the minds of the apostles: As the first order of doorkeepers for the new stage of development in the household of God, *they* must not sleep, but stay alert.

The doorkeeper has two primary responsibilities: to keep danger out, and let family members in — beginning with the master of the house himself (cf. the doorkeeper of the sheepfold, Joh 10.1-3). If we think of the doorkeepers’ responsibilities in the context of **the temple**, we find that besides guarding God’s house against something coming in that would defile the precincts (cf. the authority — keys — given the apostles to bind and to loose, Mat 16.19; 18.18), they also offered sacrifices and ministered to the people (Eze 44.11). If we think of the gatekeeper of **a city**, we discover that he has a relationship with the watchman on the wall (or roof of the gate; 2Sa 18.24-26); the watchman on the wall is able to see what approaches in the distance, and he warns the gatekeeper below whether to open to friends or barricade against a threat.

The doorkeeper of a **spiritual house**, then, has pastoral responsibility. He guards the flock from danger and defilement, while welcoming everything that is consistent with the Master's presence and that keeps the rest of the household functioning in proper relationship to the Master. To do his job well, the gatekeeper of God's great house must keep his ear attuned to the prophets (i.e., the Holy Spirit speaking through prophets, apostles, and above all Jesus Himself) who can alert us in advance to both coming blessing and approaching danger.

*** Mar 13.34-37 §3: To Each One His Task.**

In "the parable of the doorkeeper," the Lord singles out a key role in the household of God. However, He also mentions the servants as a whole, and the fact that to each is given authority for his or her task. Therefore, in the household of God, no one should say, "Well, I'm not a doorkeeper, I'm not cut out to be a pastor, so I guess I'm only a spectator in the church." On the contrary, we all have spiritual gifts, and though our gifts differ, Scripture commands us to exercise the gifts we have received for the building up of the body of Christ and the glory of God (Rom 12.4-8; 1Pe 4.10-11).

Furthermore, we all have doorkeeper responsibility if we care about the spiritual welfare of even one other person. Parents, mentors, work supervisors, best friends — all are doorkeepers, even if for a relatively small house. Since "he who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much" (Luk 16.10), a doorkeeper who faithfully protects and encourages his one friend by ministering the life-giving and fortifying words of the Holy Spirit to him, will in time find himself the doorkeeper of a larger house.

*** Mar 13.34-37 §4: Stay Awake! Stay Alert!**

The doorkeeper must stay alert, not only to welcome the Master of the house upon His return, but also to protect the Master's household in His absence. In the household of God, then, those with pastoral responsibility must protect the congregation from the "savage wolves [that] will come" bringing false teaching and religious scams (Act 20.29-31), as well as from spiritual or moral compromise that originates from within their own flock. In order to do

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so, the pastoral gatekeeper must stay alert and pray that he himself (or she herself) does not enter into temptation, recognizing that the strongest of human leaders is still weakened by the flesh (Mat 26.41). It should go without saying that all of this requires the pastoral doorkeeper to remain saturated with God's words (Psa 119), and ever in pursuit of God's wisdom (Pro 2).

Finally, what is true for the doorkeepers is true for all: "Stay awake!" "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (1Co 16.13).

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